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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [KCRM](#) [KE](#)
SUBJECT: CONTINUED CLASHES WITH POLICE IN NAIROBI

REF: A) Nairobi 800 B) Nairobi 458 C) Nairobi 525

¶1. Summary: Recent days-long clashes between police and squatter mechanics in Nairobi have disrupted movement throughout the city. Police initially intervened in a property dispute but backed down as riots dragged into a fifth day, causing one death and more than twenty injuries. The inability of government to resolve the five-year-old dispute contributed to the violence and adds to a growing mistrust of the security sector. End Summary.

¶2. Roughly two thousand mechanics have operated the "Grogan garages" on land formerly owned by the City Council for more than two decades. Five years ago the land was sold to the Jamia Mosque who delayed development due to expected tensions with the squatters. By all accounts the land was acquired legally. The City made no efforts to open talks with the squatters or make alternate plans for their resettlement.

¶3. Tensions mounted in February when plans to develop the land and evict the mechanics led to two days of clashes with police. The developers fenced in the area in March to prevent access to the garages. The fence was torn down and two more days of riots ensued.

In early May, the developers dug trenches around the property preventing vehicles from entering the property. Five days of riots began which resulted in the majority of injuries. One mechanic was shot, hospitalized, and arrested upon his release. Police and the mechanics both alleged that criminal gang members intervened against them respectively, but these statements could not be confirmed.

¶4. Government reaction has been inconsistent. Police and Internal Security Minister George Saitoti initially intervened on behalf of the developers to quell the protests. However, local Member of Parliament and Assistant Housing Minister Margaret Wanjiru declared support for the mechanics and pleaded with them to let the government resolve the conflict - a hollow statement to many given the government's inability to resolve the dispute over the past five years. Ultimately, police and Minister Saitoti backed down pending a resolution. Mechanics reoccupied the land but tensions remain high.

¶5. The government is treating the dispute as a zero-sum game - an approach that will certainly disappoint one party and risk further conflict. Jamia Mosque alleges a legal right to develop the land and seems intent on continuing with their plans. The City Council is trying to buy the land back at the original price, but the Mosque is hesitant as the value has increased since the date of purchase. So far no effort has been made to resettle the mechanics or find some other compromise.

¶6. Comment: The conflict is emblematic of the declining faith Kenyans have in the rule of law to solve their problems. Citizens recently attacked suspected Mungiki members in Central province in several vigilante incidents (Ref A). The alleged involvement of the police surrounding the murders of human rights activists from the Oscar Foundation also damaged public confidence (Refs B, C). Ultimately, the government's lack of credibility in resolving this dispute could lead to further unrest. Protests are expected to continue until a resolution is reached. End Comment.

RANNEBERGER